

MINISTRY OF

AGRICULTURE



# ALLOTMENT & *Garden Guide*

VOL. 1 No. 5

MAY - 1945

"Button to chin till May be in,  
Cast not a clout till May be out"

And then some people say "Marry in May, repent alway". Perhaps if we do marry in May we may find the maid—like the month—fickle and fitful; sometimes sunny, sometimes stormy—and sometimes more than a bit frosty! That is the trouble

with May, those killing frosts that do so much damage to our fruit blossom and young potato plants, and catch the unwise and unwary who put out their tomato plants too early and without protection. The end of May is quite soon enough for tomato planting. Too often we gardeners cling to tradition and get too far ahead with our sowing and planting, regardless of how our weather varies and how treacherous it can be.

However, May should be a busy month with all of us—so here's



hoping you will be "as full of spirit as the month of May". And watch out for those frosts!

May is a month for many jobs on the vegetable plot and it's not easy to keep pace with them all. Let's just list them now and deal with them

in turn. Here they are:—

Thinning seedlings; earthing up potatoes; mulching peas and beans; top dressing certain crops; sowing winter greens in the seedbed and planting out Brussels; making successional sowings of earlier crops; sowing runners and marrows; planting out tomatoes; attending to the compost heap and keeping an eye open for pests.

Now let's say a bit about each of them.

## **Thin SEEDLINGS**

Always try to seize the opportunity, if the ground's fairly moist and the weather cool with a promise

of warm showers to come, to thin any crops that need it—lettuce, spinach, parsnips and, later on, spring-sown onions. If these crops need thinning when



the soil is too dry and the weather seems set fair, water them thoroughly before thinning and again as soon as you have finished. This will prevent too great a disturbance of the seedlings remaining while their neighbours were being pulled out.

Generally thin seedlings twice :

first leaving twice as many plants as you will need ; at the second thinning remove every other plant. Always pull out the weakest seedlings, leaving the strongest to grow on. Hoe between the rows, removing any seedling weeds at thinning time, and leaving the plot tidy.

## ***Earth up POTATOES***

It is important that during the period of active growth your potato plot should be hoed and kept free from weeds. If there is a danger of

frost when the young plants appear, cover them lightly with soil.

The first



up helps to keep the haulms upright, and prevents the tubers from being exposed to the light, which would make them go green. Incidentally, a good covering of soil over the tubers protects them in case of an outbreak of blight on the foliage. Blight spores don't work down the stems to the tubers,



earthing up should be done when the plants are some 6 in. high, and further soil should be drawn up to form a ridge about three weeks later. But don't cover up the leaves this time—they need all the light and air that they can get. Earthing

as some people think ; they drop from the haulm directly on to the soil. So make your ridge as illustrated ; don't leave a very pronounced furrow at the top, into which rain may wash the blight.

### **MULCH PEAS & BEANS**

Both peas and beans specially need moisture to produce a good crop. In very dry weather, instead of watering, spread grass mowings, decayed leaves or compost to a depth of 1 in. along each side of the rows.

**TOP DRESS.** Very young plants, such as lettuce and spinach, will appreciate a top dressing of

sulphate of ammonia—about  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. to the yard run.

### **Greens for the Seedbed**

May is the month for sowing in the seedbed seeds of sprouting broccoli (mid-May), winter cabbage (also mid-May), kale and savoy (late May). How to use a seedbed was described in the March issue of this Guide (page 3).



## Plant **BRUSSELS SPROUTS**

May to June is the period for planting out your Brussels. The Ministry's plan provides for two



TAKE CARE IN LIFTING FROM SEED BED

rows,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ft. between rows and the same distance between plants. Don't forget that the plants need a long season of growth to develop properly. If your ground is poor, you would do well to fork well into the surface, before planting, 2 oz. to the square yard of some complete fertiliser such as "National Growmore", which is of special value to crops that have to stand the winter.

Be careful in lifting from the seedbed to see that you get a good ball of soil round the roots. Should the weather be dry, water the

seedbed row the night before. Plant with a dibber deep enough to bury the roots and stem up to the first leaves. Press the soil firmly round the plant with the dibber or your heel. If you plant in dry weather give the plants a good watering. Some gardeners practise puddling, placing soil and water in a bucket and plunging the plants' roots in it before planting. If the dry weather continues, water the plants each day, if you can, until they are established and show



signs of making new growth. Hoe frequently between rows and plants. To make watering more effective some gardeners plant in a drill about three or four in. deep.

### **SOW FOR SUCCESSION**

Beet, carrots, lettuce and

radishes (see March and April Guides for directions).

## **Sow RUNNERS**

Runners do best on soil well trenched and given a good dressing of manure or compost, as advised in the February Guide (page 8). Clay soils are usually too wet and cold for them.

One pint will sow a double row of 50 ft. The plants are very tender and seeds should not be sown in

the open until May, though early crops may be secured by sowing in boxes in a frame or a greenhouse and transplanting later. In the open, sow the seed in double rows with 9 in. of space between the plants. For single rows, the plants should stand 12 in. apart.

If you have double rows, it is an advantage for staking to put the



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weather is dry. Dust with soot at intervals, as a prevention against leaf maggot. Earthing up will be dealt with in the June Guide.

Some people like *celeriac*—a turnip-rooted celery—for flavouring stews. You may like to try a

row as an experiment. Plant in shallow drills 18 in. apart, 12 in. between plants. *Celeriac* also needs plenty of water in dry weather. Remove side shoots as they appear and hoe regularly.

## ***The popular war-time crop . .*** **TOMATOES**

Judging by the response to the Ministry's advertisements in earlier years, the tomato is crop No. 1 with war-time gardeners and allotment holders. Unfortunately, despite many warnings, some amateurs have been taken in every year by unscrupulous people who sell them tomato plants far too early for planting outside. It is foolish to hope that the danger of frost is past until at least the end of May. As with so many gardening jobs there is no fixed date for planting; it varies from about May 20 in the south-west to the end of the second week in June in the north. Little is gained and much may be lost by rushing plants out of doors a week or ten days

before the weather has warmed up. The plants do not grow away well, and if the nights are cold they turn a dark, unhealthy colour and are seriously checked.

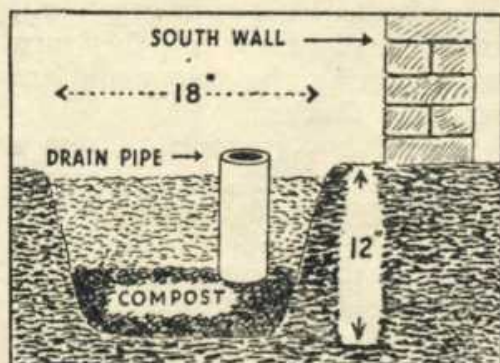
Always buy your plants from a reliable supplier. A well-grown tomato plant should be sturdy and short-jointed—about 6 or 8 in. high, with the buds of the first flower truss visible in the head of the plant. The distance between the leaves should be small and the leaves should be dark and of a bluish tinge. As a rule, plants produced in pots are best for planting in the open. Avoid "leggy" plants at all costs.

To grow tomatoes successfully





in the open you must have a good site. The best spot would be in the shelter of a wall or fence facing south or south-west, because there the temperature won't fall too low at night. The plants will get some sunshine there and be protected from the cold east winds we often get early in June. Get the ground ready well in advance of planting. Take out a trench 9 to 12 in. deep and 15 to 18 in. wide and dig in compost or well-rotted manure into



the second spit. For watering during summer get some unglazed drainpipes, if you can, and put them upright into the trench, 3 ft. apart. Then fill up the trench with the soil you took out. These pipes will let the water get to the subsoil, which it is difficult to wet by surface watering.

When you fill up the trench, sprinkle a suitable fertiliser—

"National Growmore", for instance—over the surface: 1 to 2 oz. to every yard of trench, and mix it in with a fork.

The plants should be at least 18 in. apart in the row; if you have more than one row, make the rows 3 ft. apart. Measure and mark out beforehand where the plants should go, putting in a 4 ft. stake at each position.

Before planting, make sure that the ball of soil round the roots is really wet. If you have bought plants in pots, stand them in water for about 20 minutes so that the ball is completely covered. Drain away excess water before planting.

Plant with a trowel. When planting from pots, take care not to damage the roots when you take the ball of soil out of the pot. Make the hole about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. to 1 in. deeper than the height of the ball of soil. Then put the ball in the hole and pack the soil tightly round it. Make a saucer-like depression round each plant: it is very useful for watering, and the absence of loose soil round the base of the stem makes it difficult for wire-worm to get in.

Immediately after planting, water each plant to set the soil round it. Then watch out that the ball of soil does not begin to dry

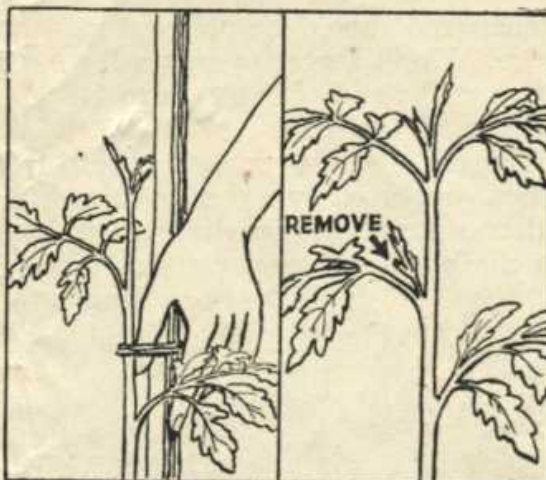




out. If it does, give each plant about a pint of water.

When you have finished planting, tie the plants to the stakes you put in as markers. Tie loosely; a good guide is to leave room for your thumb to go between plant and stake. As the plant grows, tie it again to keep it upright, and remove every side shoot that appears in the corners formed by the leaf stalks and the main stem. These side shoots are usually dealt with when they are about 1 to 1½ in. long. Don't let them get too big; if that happens, cut them off close

to the stem with a sharp knife. More about tomatoes next month.



## ***Attend to the Compost Heap***

The importance of compost was described in the January Guide, and the March issue dealt with how to make it. May is the time of the year when further materials such as waste vegetable matter, coarse grass, lawn

mowings and annual weeds, become available for the heap. While not forgetting the needs of domestic livestock, all the waste material that can be collected should be rotted down on the compost heap.

## ***Look out for PESTS***

If you are growing broad beans, look out for signs of black fly and tackle this pest early, as advised on page 6 of the April Guide. If you are growing early turnips, you may be troubled with the flea beetle. Last month's Guide also dealt with that.

To prevent the depredations of the onion fly, sprinkle 4% calomel dust along the rows of spring onions when the seedlings are about 1½ in. high; repeat about 10 days later. Your seedling carrots may suffer from the carrot fly, so apply naphthalene dust to the rows and repeat at 10-day intervals until the end of June.

Some gardeners put lengths of creosoted string about 2 in. above their carrot rows, and find this wards off the carrot fly. You will need to dress the string with creosote three

times (at fortnightly intervals, beginning mid-May) for early sowings and five times for the maincrop. You can put the creosote on with a brush or take the string up and re-dip it. You must not allow any of the liquid to splash on to the plants or it will "burn" the leaves.





## A bit about BIRDS

The nesting season of wild birds is in full swing in May. Soon the birds themselves will reach their peak of usefulness to man.

Robin, wren, hedge-sparrow, song-thrush and many others will be about their business of finding food for hungry nestlings, and so will be making constant

inroads on garden pests. True, the song-thrush may later take small toll of your bush fruit; but, all the same, this bird is the gardener's very good friend. Of all our birds, it is the champion snail killer; if it were

no more than that, it would deserve protection and encouragement. As for robin, wren and hedge-sparrow—nobody has anything but good to say of them; in fact, there is nothing but good to say. Any or all of them may nest in gardens; if any of them nests in yours, let it nest in peace. Your interest and protection will be repaid a hundredfold.

Then there are the great tit and the blue tit. If you have a nest box in your garden—maybe even if you haven't—you may have the



ROBIN



TIT



THRUSH



HEDGE SPARROW

an occasional beakful of fruit?

It's a pity to add a discordant note; but there are birds you will need to watch. The

house-sparrow, it is true, feeds its young on grubs and insects and

takes a good many for itself; but it can be a nuisance when green things are coming through. If you are

near a wood and there are jays about, look to your peas. If there are woodpigeons, look to anything

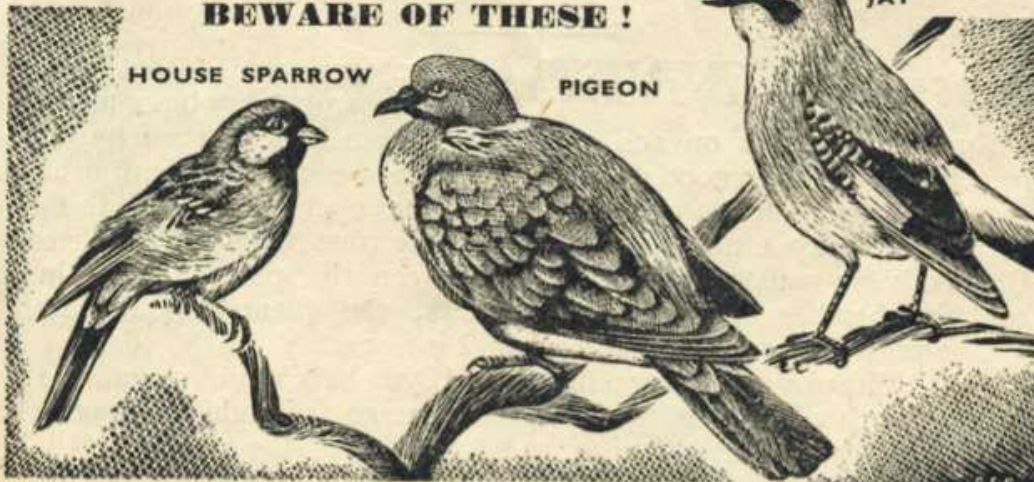
the garden that can be eaten. But apart from these few, the birds are your friends. If you

give them a square deal, they will give you something better than that, for not

all your labour or insecticides will do so much to keep the garden clean. And,

remember, the birds are on the job all day long.

### BEWARE OF THESE !



HOUSE SPARROW

PIGEON

JAY